

## ENTOMOLOGICAL FORAYS IN FRANCE, 1983

By B. GOATER\*

My wife and I made our first excursion to France this year on 8th April. Our habit is to cross to Boulogne and drive hard to a charming spot in the Forêt de Hez (Oise), to the east of Paris, where we spend the first night. Early next morning we drove on to the Rhône valley, through warm drizzle which later gave way to hazy sunshine. We stopped for a picnic lunch beside a pinewood devastated by processionaries (*Thaumetopoea pityocampa* D. & S.). The snake-like processions were common on the road and we kept a few which gave us acute urticarial rash. In the same area, *Nymphalis polychloros* L. was seen at blackthorn flowers; later in the day, we saw *N. antiopa* L. and *Inachis io* L. on the wing. The night was spent in a calcareous quarry above the west bank of the Rhône in the Ardèche, opposite the elegant town of Valence. About 50 species of moth were recorded at light. The commonest was the large spring form of *Epimecia ustula* Freyer in very fresh condition, a species I had not encountered before. Other notable captures included three *Dasyampa rubiginea* D. & S. and two *D. erythrocephala* D. & S., both species giving eggs from which good series were subsequently bred, a dark female *Lithophane socia* Hufn. which also yielded a bred series, the common *Orthosia* spp. including the only *O. populeti* Fabr. I have seen in France, *Panolis flammea* D. & S., *Mythinna sicula scirpi* Dup., *Valeria jaspidea* de Vill., *Actinotia hyperici* D. & S., the silver grey form of *Egira conspiciellaris* L., *Stegania trimaculata* de Vill., *Eupithecia oxycedrata* Rambur in quantity, *E. innotata* Hufn. and *Cyclophora suppunctaria* Zell.

In 1982, I took a short series of the local agrotid, *Agrotis turatii* Standfuss on the hills above la Voulte (Ardèche), and one of the main objectives in 1983 was to extend the series. We made two attempts, on 10th and 20th April, and failed both times. Judging by the other species present, we were too early in a season which was quite as retarded on the Continent as it was in Britain. Beating the junipers yielded half grown larvae of *Pachypasa limosa* Serres: two were diseased, but I bred a male and a female. On spruce we obtained larvae of *Thera britannica* Turner, *Hylaea fasciaria* L. including f. *prasinaria* D. & S., and *Puengeleria capreolaria* D. & S. Larvae of *Cymbalophora pudica* Esp. were common at night on grass.

The weather became extremely windy as we drove down into Provence. In 1982, at Digne, I found many workings of *Paranthrene tabaniformis* Rott. in stems of sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides* L.) and bred one moth. This year there were none. The nights were bitterly cold and we recorded nothing of note until the 13th, when

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we found a strong colony of the brilliant geometer, *Eurranthis plum-mistraria* de Vill. flying by day in bright sunshine at Pic de la Gardiette (Var). The speedy pyrale, *Titanio pollinalis* D. & S. was also present but difficult to catch. At night there, in clear, cool but reasonably still conditions *Nola subchlamydula* Staud. came commonly to light. Among the two dozen other species were some worn male *Cerastis faceta* Treits., *Eupithecia cocciferata* Mill. and *Rhoptria asperaria* Hubn.

The Mediterranean coast of France is all but ruined and it is extremely difficult to find workable habitat. We discovered a promising area at St. Aygulf near Frejus and were very disappointed when the night turned bitterly cold and almost nothing flew. We had to be content with some very grey *Orthosia gracilis* D. & S. and one *Dicranura (Exaereta) ulmi* D. & S.

On 16th we called on M. and Mme. Dujardin in Nice who treated us with the utmost kindness whilst supersaturating my mind with French entomological lore. Afterwards we were taken to the limestone hills above Vence whence we looked down on the twinkling lights of the conurbation along the coast, and set up our lamps in what was clearly a magnificent locality. By far the commonest moth on this occasion was *Valeria oleagina* D. & S., but it is really only in the S. E. corner of France and a most unlikely species to turn up in Richmond Park! The other interesting species was *D. rubiginea*, and in this locality it is very variable. Females were obtained and moths bred. It was astonishing to me to find it on these limestone hills, such a different habitat from the sandy, acid pine heaths of Surrey and Hampshire. We set up the next night lower down the hill, opposite a stone wall which is evidently known to all, entomologist or not, as the 'Mur de Boursin'. At last we enjoyed mild conditions and the number of species recorded rose accordingly. *Dyscia lentiscaria* Donzel was quite common, I took a fine fresh *Eublemma ostrina* Hubn., but probably the best insect was a male *Endromis versicolora* L. of the large, richly coloured subsp. *meridionalis* Rougeot, well south of its usual range.

Up in the Alps at this time of year fly three interesting species, the arctiid *Ocnogyna parasita* Hubn. and the noctuids *Perigrapha i-cinctum* D. & S. and *Dasypolia ferdinandi* Ruhl. They are known to fly over the snow and sometimes get frozen into it. Thus we were to spend the next two nights in sheer misery, standing on the snow at 1800m. beside the lamp, the first night in heavy rain and the second in paralysing cold. We failed to see any of these moths, but on the first night there was an extraordinary migration of thousands of *Agrotis ipsilon* Hufn., with a few *Autographa gamma* L., *Agrotis segetum* D. & S., *Mythimna vitellina* Hybn. and a cloud of *Plutella xylostella* L. The best moth was a single *Hypena obesalis* Treits.

The weather was still bad as we began our journey home, and there was abundant evidence in the centre of France of recent

devastating storms, with whole forests of young trees with their trunks smashed. We broke our journey in the Fôret de Tronçais (Allier), in which males of *Agria tau* L. were disporting themselves among the beeches. Light produced *D. erythrocephala* ab. *glabra* Hubn. which duly laid, but very little else.

Summer was quite different. We set off on 27 July and had a fortnight of glorious weather, with an abundance of insect life wherever we went. On the first night, in the Forêt de Hez, *Callopietria juvenina* Stoll was the commonest moth, and the 68 other species recorded included the notodontids *Drymonia* (*Ochrostigna*) *melagona* Borkh., *Notodonta torva* Hubn. (10) and *Gluphisia crenata* Esp., several *Palaeodrepana harpagula* Esp., a female *Heterogenea asella* D. & S., some of the small summer brood of *Plagodis pulveraria* L., three *Cryphia algae* Fabr., *Trisateles emortualis* D. & S. and a good many worn *Herminia lunalis* Scop.

The next night we chose the edge of a young oak wood on rolling limestone country south of Auxerre (Yonne) and had a spectacular catch of nearly a hundred species. Both *Catocala sponsa* L. and *C. promissa* D. & S. appeared at sugar and *Ephesia fulminea* Scop. came to light. So did *Dendrolinus pini* L., *Odonestis pruni* L., *Drepana curvatula* Borkh., some more *D. melagona*, several *Malacosoma castrensis* which one associates with salterns in Britain, *Meganola albula* D. & S., several *Scopula nigropunctata* Hufn., *Scotopteryx moeniata* Scop., *Horisme aquata* Hubn. Among the noctuids were *Acronicta strigosa* D. & S., *A. auricoma* D. & S., *A. alni* L., several *Polyphaenis sericata* Esp. past their best, *Heliothis viriplicata* Hufn., *Emmelia trabealis* Scop. and *Paracolax derivialis* Hubn.

Our next destination was the Marais de Cormaranche (Ain) and the particular objective *Paradiarsia punicea* Hubn. which we failed to find. However, over 75 species put in an appearance including *Epione repandaria* Hufn. and *E. paralellaria* D. & S., *Eilema lutarella* L., *Herminia tarsicrinalis* Knoch, *Polychrisia moneta* Fabr., *Autographa bractea* D. & S., dark *Mamestra suasa* D. & S. and many common English species.

30th July quickly became hot and sunny, and soon after setting forth I saw my first apollo, a grand sight. There were many species of butterfly in the subalpine meadows of the Ain which we enjoyed with out wishing to catch them or study them critically. We came across a colony of *Zygaena carniolica* Scop., most of the moths resting on scabious heads. We were tempted to try a night op. in attractive countryside at Col de la Lebe and were rewarded with a single fresh *Amphipyra perflua* Fabr., a rarity in France and recorded, as far as I can gather, only in the department of the Ain. The *Berberis* bushes were evidently the source of several *Paraeulype berberata* D. & S. and our first *Auchmis detersa* Esp., the latter rather worn. *Puengeleria capreolaria* and *Peribatodes secundaria* Esp. came from the spruce woods.

The next day found us in the Alps at last, and we explored the contry of the Savoie between Valloire and Col du Galibier. By day, *Crocota lutearia* Fabr. and *Perizoma verberata* Scop. were freely disturbed from long vegetation beside the river near Valloire, but we settled for the night higher up at about 2400m. and experienced a foray in which almost everything was new to our eyes. Large numbers of the big noctuids *Apamea zeta* Treits., *A. lateritia* Hufn. and *Rhyacia helvetina* Boisd. dominated the sheet, among them *Chersotis cuprea* D. & S., *C. ocellina* D. & S., *C. larixia* Guen. and one *C. andereggii* Boisd., *Ochropleura celsicola* Bellier, *Hada proxima* Hubn., in some numbers, five *Euchalcia variabilis* Pill. & Mitt., several *Agrotis simplonia* Geyer, *Rhyacia grisescens* Fabr., *Lemonia taraxaci* D. & S., *Perizoma obsoletaria* H.-S., *Aplocera praeformata* Hubn. and *A. simplicata* Treits. We retired, intoxicated, to bed — very late.

In the morning we walked locally amid flowery rock gardens in sunshine; butterflies were plentiful, including several species of small fritillary and *Colias phicomone* Esp. We netted three *Pygmaena fusca* Thunb., *Scopula immorata* L., *Idaea flaveolaria* Hubn., *Setina aurita ramosa* Fabr. and several species of *Zygaena*. My wife found a female *Malacosoma alpicola* Staud. at rest on vegetation, and shortly after midday I noticed a small dark moth flying low over the turf before shooting off at great speed. In a minute or so, it or another was back and I netted it — a male *alpicola*. By lying on the ground at this spot and pouncing as they arrived, I was able to net four more, but missed as many. They appeared to be assembling, though no female could be found.

Our intention was to spend the next night really high, but we were forced down to Lautaret by a spectacular cold thunderstorm. The night, even here, seemed most unpropitious, so we set up the trap and retired. Next morning, it was full of moths, notably eight *Cucullia lucifuga* D. & S., *Apamea rubrivena* Treits., *Chersotis alpestris* f.c., *Eriopygodes imbecilla* Fabr., *Eurois occulta* L., *Paradiarsia sobrina* Dup., *Euchalcia variabilis*, *E. modesta* Hubn., *Hadena caesia* D. & S. *Xestia ochreago* Hubn., *Heliophobus reticulata* Goeze, many *H. proxima*, several more *O. celsicola* and four of the small arctiid, *Chelis maculosa* Gerning.

We drove by stages to Esteng (Alp. Marit.) which was to be our headquarters for the next three nights. This is another rich montane locality (1800m.) which yielded, among other things, many *A. detersa* and *C. alpestris* at flowers from dusk onwards, and at light several of the large, white *Coscinia cribraria candida* Cyrillo, numerous *Xestia ashworthii candelarum* Staud., *Ochropleura renigera* Hubn. and *Euxoa decora simulatrix* Hubn., several *Chersotis elegans* Evers., *Hoplodrina respersa* D. & S., *Caradrina selini* Boisd., two *C. gilva* Donzel, *Ochropleura celsicola* and *O. signifera* D. & S., *Opigena polygona* D. & S., single *A. rubrivena*, *Hadena tephroleuca*

Boisd., *H. compta* D. & S., and *Syngrapha ain* Hochenwarth. Among the geometers, there were many *Eupithecia semigraphata* Bruand, *Colostygia aptata* Hubn., *Eulithis prunata* L., several *Scotopteryx diniensis* Neub. and *P. berberata*, *Scopula incanata* L., *Idaea flaveolaria*, Hubn., *Triphosa sabaudata* Dup., *Catarhoe cuculata* Hufn. and *Gnophos glaucinarius* Hubn.

On Aug. 5th we moved down to Guillaumes, 800m., and tried sugar beside the river. Several *Catocala puerpera* Giorna, one *C. promissa*, one *Mormo maura* L. and two *Lygephila craccae* D. & S. were the principal visitors, while light attracted *Abrostola asclepiadis* D. & S., *Ochropleura nigrescens* Hofner, *E. occulta* (2), *P. sericata* (2), *Agrotis crassa* Hubn. and *C. selini* in a total of 45 species.

Next day we stopped for ablutions at an attractive waterfall on a tributary of the R. Var, and found under the bridge there many *Ephesia nymphaea* Esp. and a few *Catocala nymphagoga* Esp. We discovered that the area north of St. Martin Vesubie was heavily planted up with conifers and that camping was forbidden on account of the risk of fire, so after wandering about for some time we ended up at a promontory overlooking the valley near Valdeblore. This turned out to be another very productive spot, where we spent a second night. Among the many species new to us were *Hyles vesperilio* Esp., *Ochropleura candelisequa* D. & S. (3), *Chersotis margaritacea* de Vill., *Polymixis dubia* Dup., *Cryphia simulatricula* Guen. (5), *C. petricolor galathea* Mill., *Hoplodrina superstes* Ochs., *Eublemma parva* Hubn., *E. jucunda* Hubn., *Axia margarita* Hubn., *Eucrostis indigenata* de Vill., *Scopula submutata* Treits., *Idaea rufaria* Hubn., *I. moniliata* D. & S., *I. calunetaria* Staud., *I. vesubiata* Mill., *Cataclysmes riguata* Hubn., *Euphyia frustata* Treits., *Eupithecia gueneata* Mab., *Ecleora solieraria* Rambur, and *Gnophos furvatus* D. & S., Others included *Hyles lineata livornica* Esp., *Drymonia querna* D. & S., *Diacrisia sannio* L., *Nola chlamytulalis* Hubn., *O. nigrescens*, *Epilecta linogrisea* D. & S., *Cryphia raptricula* D. & S., *P. sericata*, *Epimecia ustula* (much smaller than the specimens seen in April), *E. ostrina*, *E. purpurina* D. & S., *E. polygramma* Dup., *Chrysodeixis chalcites* Esp., *Catocala conjuncta* Esp., *Calyptra thalictri* Borkh., several *H. obesalis*, *Thetidia smaragdaria* Fabr., *S. diniensis*, *Selidosema brunnearia* de Vill. and *Synopsia sociaria* Hubn.

Our last night in the south was at Col de Vence. Here we found large numbers of *Ennomos quercaria* Hubn. at light, and also took two *Lophoterges millierei* Staud., two *Oxycesta nervosa* D. & S., several of the *Eublemma* spp. already encountered plus one *E. sauva* Hubn., several *A. crassa* and *Mythimna putrescens* Hubn. and another *A. margarita*.

Retracing our steps, we spent the next night high in the Col du Galibier, on the Savoie side, in still, cool conditions. We did not expect to see many species, but were delighted with one specimen

of that prime rarity of the high ground, *Standfussiana wiskotti* Standfuss, one *S. nyctimera* Boisd., four *Euxoa culminicola* Staud. and a lot of *Elophos unicoloraria* Staud. We also took only the second *L. taraxaci* to come our way.

The spot south of Auxerre was out staging post on the way home, and this time it was less productive in spite of a distant thunderstorm which made conditions oppressive and humid. *C. spona* was common at sugar, and the light produced *Harpyia (Hoplitis) milhauseri* Fabr., a couple of *Ptilodontella cucullina* D. & S., *Mythimna albipuncta* D. & S., three *craccae* and some small specimens of *Apeira syringaria* L. in a total of 74 species.

On the Continent, there are several species complexes which can only be sorted out by examination of the genitalia. We kept about 20 *caesia* taken in various parts of the Alps, hoping to find among them *H. clara* Staud. Alas, they all proved to be *caesia*. Likewise, all the *algae* were indeed that species and not *C. ochsi* Boursin or *C. pallida* Bethune-Baker. On the other hand, it was gratifying to find that two *Chersotis* taken at Col de Vence were the recently discovered *C. grammiptera* Rambur, which is very similar to *C. elegans*. Some *Peribatodes* bred from *Juniperus oxycedrus* L. at la Voulte are, I think, merely *rhomboidaria* D. & S. and not *P. perversaria* Boisd., but pale specimens taken at Valdeblore are *P. abstersaria* Boisd.

Several species were bred from eggs or larvae obtained in April, and were imported under licence No. PHF 30/126 issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to whom I express my thanks for their kind assistance. The heat of the summer was not conducive to oviposition by captured females, and I failed with the ones I tried. Some larvae of *Hyles euphorbiae* L. were brought back and excited the interest of H. M. Customs and Excise; three moths emerged during the autumn, but the remaining pupae appear to be overwintering.

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A RARE ABERRATION OF THE HEART AND DART: AGROTIS EXCLAMATIONIS L. — During the summer of 1984, large numbers of this moth were attracted here to my moth trap, and on 21st July I captured the rare ab. *obsoleta* Tutt. The moth looked like a wainscot and was determined by my friend Ian Lorimer. See Goater, *Proc. Brit. ent. nat. Hist. Soc.* 2(2): 64, plt. X1, fig. 9 (11 in error). — R. T. LOWE, 61 Erskine Hill, London NW11 6E.

HADENA COMPTA D. & S. (LEP.: NOCTUIDAE) CONTINUING SPREAD IN 1984. — On 24th. July 1984, I took a male *Hadena compta* D. & S. from my garden MV trap in Winchester VC 11. This is the first record for the vice-county, although it was recorded further eastwards in North Hampshire (VC 12) in 1983 by Mr. A. H. Dobson (*Ent. Gaz.* 35 : 252). — Col. D. H. STERLING, "Tangmere", 2 Hampton Lane, Winchester, Hants SO22 5LF.